The International Encyclopedia of Media Studies: a review

By Liz Ellison

The International Encyclopedia of Media Studies is a comprehensive, six volume collection of over 175 works that attempts – and I think succeeds – to provide a resource that showcases the broad and ever important field of media studies. The general editor, Angharad Valdivia, has collated six volumes of material that is organized into sections. It is worth noting that this collection emerged Valdivia's previously published and popular text, *A Companion to Media Studies* (2003). The six volumes cover: Media History and the Foundations of Media Studies; Media Production; Content and Representation; Audience and Interpretation; Media Effects/Media Psychology; and Media Studies Futures.

This is obviously an excellent tool for teachers, and is structured in such a way to appeal to content coordination, by providing a throughline of media studies from historical approaches through to the future of media studies. However, by including plenty of chapters that are specific and focused, it also is a reference possibility for students or researchers to take in chunks at a time. Although best examined in a whole, each volume does stand alone. It also introduces an important and useful discussion of terminology and the constant shifting of meaning in terms like 'digital media' or 'new media'. A particularly nice inclusion is the short abstracts at the beginning of the chapter that identify the chapter's goal, and allows for quite easy browsing of the comprehensive texts.

Volume One provides narratives of media history. It attempts to '[offer] a map of this still anarchic field' (21). While being open about the incoherence of the field, Valdivia also acknowledges the 'dead white men' (22) of media studies (Marx, Innis, McLuhan, and Foucault). The first volume is out of necessity quite theoretically heavy. Yet regardless, the chapters are often engaging and readable, suitable for both scholars and students in many instances.

Volume Two explores media production. As with Volume One, it combines some broader discussions with more specialised chapters. One chapter examines queer television as part of production culture. Quinn Miller suggests, 'While hostile to queers and queerness in its own ways, Hollywood has long welcomed queer labor and has thus been more likely than other fields to harbor queer culture' (458). Miller's article examines the importance of examining queer workers behind the scenes of media texts as well as the representation of cultural production in television shows such as Tina Fey's *30 Rock.* Ultimately, Miller's detailed exploration of queer production culture is fascinating, citing examples primarily from *30 Rock*, alongside other 'backstage' series like *The Larry Sanders Show.* By examining the use of terms like 'queer' and 'camp', Miller unpacks questions around LGBT representation within the cultural production world of television in a thorough fashion.

A work on media would be remiss to not include discussion of YouTube, and the inclusion of Alendra Juhasz's 'YouTube Stylo: writing and teaching with Digital Video' is a practical and engaging selection. Juhasz's chapter attempts to

showcase the benefit of utilising YouTube-style writing, particularly in a teaching environment. Using a case study of her own students, Juhasz entertaining article challenges YouTube – simultaneously the bastion and aid of media teachers internationally – and argues for implementing stylistic lessons from the YouTube form. Juhasz questions whether we continue to embrace the pen and the technique of writing about images and sounds, or should we instead embrace the digital world the newest students have been raised in. Yet, she acknowledges, 'we can also work to improve it by helping to contribute to its sea of mostly mediocre and uncritical products' (426). YouTube is at heart a medium user-generated. Juhasz's chapter focuses on the idea of generating a smarter, more critical generation who are steeped in the language or 'stylo' of YouTube and therefore are able to create more savvy media products within it. The 10 types of writing for YouTube are discussed at length in the chapter, supported by Juhasz's experience within her classroom and are an interesting exploration of a topic sometimes considered mundane.

Examining means of production leads quite seamlessly into Volume Three's exploration of content and representation. The volume opens with a great collection of case studies about persuasion and information, including Vavrus' chapter, 'Marketing Militarism to Moms: news and branding after September 11th'. Vavrus has previously written about the tendency of news stories popularising concepts of identity which are in turn adopted by the groups in question, such as Soccer Moms. In this chapter, however, Vavrus is concerned with one group in particular – Security Moms, a group of mothers were strictly focused on national security in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of the World Trade Centre in New York. Vavrus unpacks her feminist analysis clearly and in a way that is quite suited for students engaging with scholarly thought on media representation by initially framing her understanding of feminism scholarship, including postfeminism. As a result, Vavrus' chapter is methodologically transparent and engaging, and is ultimately a revealing study of the post-9/11 shift in representations of mothers to caregivers who 'cedes responsibility for her safety and that of her family to a strong, male figure' (103).

Other chapters in the volume are broader in their analysis, as is the case in Heather Hundley's 'Mediated Portrayals of Masculinities'. Lundley initially provides a brief overview of masculinities and its position within gender discussion, examining the now consistently understood terms of hegemonic masculinity, hypermasculinity, and the recently emerging metrosexual masculinity (241). She goes on to, perhaps ambitiously, explore representations of masculinities in film, television, and print media. Although the chapter is a little sparse with contemporary examples, there are some incredibly important elements of gender studies within this chapter. For instance, the discussion of the blurring of connection between masculinity and gender (for example, flagging the way researchers have deconstructed the hegemonic masculine in the film *Boys Don't Cry*) (252) is pertinent and understandable for media scholars or students new to the intricacies of gender studies. Similarly, Hundley's reminder that previous research suggests that 'a specific portrayal of masculinity was more acceptable in a particular medium' (253) and that television audiences, for instance, are more likely to expect certain representations of masculinity.

Two chapters on blogging ('Blogging Culture' and 'Blogging the Third Wave?') illustrate the ever-growing need for more academic writing on the power and culture of blogging. 'Blogging Culture' is an interesting introduction to blogging, examining trends of class, race, and gender as part of the blogging phenomenon, as well as tracing the evolution of blogging and its effect on the blurring of the public and personal. Considering the constant shifting of technology and blogging trends, it is worth remembering that inevitably some of these chapters will date quickly. However, the inclusion of historical context in many of the chapters suggests that the content will continue to be somewhat relevant even as the style of information and content sharing it attests shifts.

The fourth volume begins with the particularly practical chapter by Meenakshi Gigi Durham, 'The Audience in the Graduate Curriculum: Training Future Scholars'. Durham notes that it is so crucial to be aware of the importance of audience interpretation, particularly in the current climate that is so user (or audience) generated (390). The chapter is split into smaller sections framed around assisting fledging researchers in their explorations of media texts and audiences, including Durham's experiences. Ultimately, Durham is showing how important it is for teachers of emerging scholars to remember the basic lesson of audience research:

> Texts don't exist in a vacuum. They are, in a sense, alive: they connect with people in various ways… We can't know about the social life of media texts unless we acknowledge that audiences are a crucial and dynamic element of the media system (41).

Volume Four continues to explore the variety of audiences media students or scholars will encounter in this digital, international age; it includes sections on reflexivity, and global and online audiences as well.

Media Effects/Media Psychology (so titled to acknowledge the shift away from the term 'effects' to 'psychology') is a significant field of study within its own right, and certainly of note in the field of psychology regardless. Volume Five is hefty, and is established as a component of the encyclopedia that is less focused on the more traditional literature review chapters of previous volumes. Instead, it encourages and includes significant contributions from the authors themselves and thus provides a wide ranging discussion of many contemporary thoughts.

What particularly interested me in this volume was the inclusion of a significant section of work on the idea of mediating or moderating media effects. Children has been a subject of much discussion throughout the entire encyclopedia; however, in this section, the authors examine the frequently hairy question of moderating media and the psychological effect unmediated media can have on children. For example, George Comstock's chapter 'Media Use, Scholastic Achievement, and Attention Span' examines a question I often raise after spending time with a classroom of students: are their attention spans truly getting shorter? Initially, Comstock establishes the reality that children (8 – 18 year olds) are indeed spending more time with media content (particularly digital) than in 2004 or 1999 (613).

Comstock's chapter is a comprehensive compilation of the varied sources of data that suggest both a negative and positive relationship between television consumption and scholastic achievement. Ultimately, he suggests that so far the data does indicate that the more time spend with media does depress scholastic prowess. However, he does mention that there is still a need for more research, particularly into the effect of content. Comstock also highlights that there is, of course, the likeliness that this negative relationship will diminish in time as consistent high achievers continue to interact with media (631). It is a sobering chapter in many ways, and establishes a context for the rest of the volume's discussions on the educational and psychological impact of television consumption.

The final volume in the series attempts to forecast some elements of the possible futures of media studies. Unsurprisingly, there are discussions of the continually expanding mobile technologies ('The 800-Pound Gorillas in the Room: the Mobile Phone and the Future of Television', for instance) and social media (Cartwright's exploration of the 'invisible pandemic' in an online world). A chapter I found illuminating was Lisa Nakamura's on user-generated campaigns against discrimination. Nakamura explores the often incredibly racist, homophobic, and sexist environment of online video games, where the discrimination is far more likely to come from other players rather than any game-related content. She identifies the 'paradox' that emerges:

> while profanity and abuse are 'trash talk', a form of discursive waste, lacking meaningful content that contributes to the game, many identified it as a distinctive and inevitable aspect of videogame multi-player culture, and thus to be defended (506).

Nakamura discusses user-generated spaces that challenge the sexist, racist, and homophobic discourse of the video-game environment, such as The Border House (a blog for 'breaking down borders in gaming') and Fatuglyorslutty, which publicizes sexist interactions online (508). As frustrating as it is to consider the discriminatory environment still existing for many online gamers, Nakamura's chapter does suggest that a future beyond this type of representation is possible and it is through the continued presence of user-generated spaces that challenge and/or ridicule discriminatory behavior online.

The final chapters of the volume are asking the question of 'What Future?', like in Thorpe's 'Artificial Life on a Dead Planet' and Lewis' 'The Dead-end of Consumerism', both of which tackle the end of an era. Finishing with an environmentalist question is a response to the current geographical climate we live in, and a smart way of concluding the mammoth series that this encyclopedia is.

It is worth noting that general editor, Valdivia, is open about his intentions to include another volume in the near future on Methods. Taking the currently six volumes to seven, the Methods section will round out the selection of material nicely. As a teacher, researcher, and a not-too-distant student, I can clearly see the significance this encyclopedia collection has as a reference for any scholar in

the vast media studies field. Well organized and easily navigable, *The International Encyclopedia of Media Studies* is an in-depth collection of many leading researchers in the field from an international background and with an international focus. It is a worthy resource for the scholar's bookshelf, although be ready to make space for it (and that forthcoming seventh volume).

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